

Early Childhood Providers Guidance on Supporting Immigrant, Refugee, Undocumented, or Mixed Status Families

Overview

Given recent concerns expressed by families regarding recent immigration activity, the following is some general guidance on how early childhood programs and providers can support children and families who are immigrants, refugees, or undocumented, or are members of a family with mixed immigration status. All children have a right to access early childhood programs, regardless of their actual or perceived immigration or citizenship status or that of their parents.

ICE Access and Safe Spaces

Ensure your agency has policies and procedures about interactions with U.S. Immigration Customs and Enforcement (ICE) and that all staff and families are aware of those policies and procedures. You have a right to respect the confidentiality of enrolled children and families. You are not required to share information or open the door for ICE without a warrant signed by a judge. Consider contacting organizations that offer “Know Your Rights” trainings and/or provide legal consultation around issues related to immigration in order to be as well-informed as possible.

Schools, including early learning programs, are considered “sensitive locations” meaning that that ICE enforcement actions are generally limited from occurring at those locations.

Family Safety Plan

Ensure all families in your program have a safety & action plan on file in case a parent/primary caregiver is arrested or detained by Immigration and cannot pick up their child. This safety plan may be more complex than an “in case of emergency” card.

- Parents should provide an emergency contact name and phone number and provide authorization for emergency contact, to pick up the child in the event a parent does not, or cannot pick up the child
- Parents should provide backup contacts in case the primary contact cannot be reached
- Parents should provide authorization for their emergency contact to make medical and legal decisions for their child
- Parents should memorize their emergency contact’s phone number
- Families should memorize their Alien Registration Number (A-Number) and give it to their emergency contact
- Families should keep their passport, identity information, proof of physical presence in the U.S. and financial information in a safe location

Mental Health Support

Families have experienced increased anxiety and uncertainty as a result of xenophobic rhetoric and changes in immigration procedures. Be prepared to provide and promote a sense of safety for children and families who are in distress. Familiarize yourself with the signs of distress among families. Address trauma and fear by promoting healthy coping and staying calm. Remind children that the adults around them will protect them. It is also important to take opportunities to practice self-care.

Resources

Families who need help or have questions can call the Illinois Coalition for Immigrant and Refugee Rights family support hotline at 1-855-HELP-MY-FAMILY (1-855-435-7693). Services are available in English/Spanish/Korean/Polish.

For Know Your Rights information and legal resources visit: <http://immigrantjustice.org/infosessions> or <http://www.icirr.org/about/get-involved/know-your-rights-and-organize>

For updates and resources on immigration issues visit: <http://www.latinopolicyforum.org/get-involved/impacto>

For examples of a family safety plan go to: http://www.icirr.org/content/documents/emergency_plan.pdf

For more mental health resources visit: <https://www.luriechildrens.org/en-us/care-services/specialties-services/center-childhood-resilience/Pages/post-election-mental-health-resources.aspx>